

An Litir Bheag

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

An Litir Bheag is a shortened and simplified version of Ruairidh's Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh (also available on the BBC website), designed for those who are at an earlier stage of learning Gaelic. The topic each week is the same as Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh so that, once the Litir Bheag is mastered, a student of the language might wish to try the full Litir. This is Litir Bheag 668 (which corresponds to Litir 972). Ruairidh can be contacted at rodny.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

About the time Julius Caesar was alive, Gaul was in different parts. In the south there was Provincia Romana. That area had come under the influence of the Greeks and, then, under the influence of Rome. We know Provincia Romana today as Provence.

North of that was Gallia Celtica, an area in which the culture and way of life was still very Celtic. And north of that was Gallia Belgica, pretty much where Belgium is today.

In the year 58 BC, the Roman governor, Julius Caesar, took advantage of the opportunity connected to the emigration of the Helvetii, a powerful tribe from Switzerland. They were looking for new land on the west coast of France.

Caesar sent an army against the Helvetii, sending them back to their own country. Caesar now had a large army in Gallia Celtica. He did not withdraw his soldiers. He continued until he had control of the country all the way to the English Channel.

A new Celtic chief then appeared – Vercingetorix. He was the head of the Averni, a tribe from central Gaul. He defeated a Roman army. But he took refuge in a hillfort called Alesia.

Mun àm a bha Iulius Cèasar beò, bha A' Ghall – Gaul – ann an diofar phàirtean. Anns a' cheann a deas bha Provincia Romana. Bha an sgìre sin air tighinn fo bhuaidh nan Greugach agus, an uair sin, fo bhuaidh na Ròimhe. Tha sinn eòlach air Provincia Romana an-diugh mar Provence.

Gu tuath air sin bha Gallia Celtica, sgìre anns an robh an cultar is dòigh-beatha gu math Ceilteach fhathast. Agus gu tuath air sin bha Gallia Belgica, an ìre mhath far a bheil A' Bheilg an-diugh.

Anns a' bhliadhna caogad 's a h-ochd (58) RC, ghabh an riaghladair Ròmanach, Iulius Cèasar, cothrom an cois eilthreachd nan Helvetii, treubh chumhachdach às an Eilbheis. Bha iad a' coimhead airson fearann ùr air costa siar na Frainge.

Chuir Cèasar armailt an sàs an aghaidh nan Helvetii, gan cur air ais don dùthaich aca fhèin. Bha armailt mhòr aig Cèasar a-nise ann an Gallia Celtica. Cha do tharraing e na saighdearan aige. Lean e air gus an robh smachd aige air an dùthaich gu ruige Caolas Shasainn.

Thàinig ceannard Ceilteach ùr am bàrr an uair sin – Vercingetorix. Bha e na cheannard air na h-Averni, treubh à meadhan na Gaill. Rinn e a' chùis air armailt Ròmanach. Ach ghabh e tèarmann

Caesar besieged Alesia. He stopped other Celtic forces from assisting Vercingetorix. Finally Vercingetorix had no choice but to surrender to him. Vercingetorix died in prison. With his death, the final hope of the Gauls to be free from Rome disappeared.

That does not mean that the Gauls were not still considering themselves to be Gauls. They were, until a Germanic tribe came in to take them over. That was after the Romans. That tribe was the Franks. They gave their name to France.

There was just one part of France that retained a little of the old Celtic language. That was Armorica in the north-west. We call that country Brittany today, as I shall explain in the next Litir.

ann an dùn monaidh ris an cante Alesia.

Rinn Cèasar sèist air Alesia. Chuir e stad air feachdan Ceilteach eile bho bhith a' dèanamh cobhair air Vercingetorix. Mu dheireadh, cha robh roghainn aig Vercingetorix ach gèilleadh ris. Chaochail Vercingetorix anns a' phrìosan. Le a bhàs, dh'fhalbh an dòchas mu dheireadh aig na Gallaich a bhith saor bhon Ròimh.

Chan eil sin a' ciallachadh nach robh na Gallaich fhathast a' coimhead orra fhèin mar Ghallaich. Bha, gus an deach treubh Ghearmailteach a-steach airson an gabhail thairis. Bha sin an dèidh nan Ròmanach. B' i an treubh sin na Frangaich. Thug iad an ainm don Fhraing.

Bha dìreach aon phàirt dhen Fhraing a ghlèidh beagan dhen t-seann chànan Ceilteach. B' e sin Armorica anns an iar-thuath. 'S e 'A' Bhreatainn Bheag a chanas sinn ris an dùthaich sin an-diugh, mar a mhìnicheas mi anns an ath Litir.